



# FIA Icon *online*

A product of the Michigan **Family Independence Agency**

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STATE OF MICHIGAN  
Family  
Independence  
Agency

[January 5, 2004](#)

[Click to read](#)

[Intercepted letters](#)

[First lines of service report available](#)

[FIA people](#)

[Heart of Solution awards 12 suggestions](#)

[Looking for love...](#)

[Children's Action Network](#)

[Quiet heroes](#)

[Kent County FIA customer honored](#)

[At risk family, new parent training](#)

[Manistee County food drive](#)

[Angels of adoption](#)

[Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative](#)

[Transparent County Lines success](#)

[Clinton-Gratiot partners with State Police](#)

[Adoption Day around Michigan](#)

[Adoption & the FIA](#)

[Suicide questionnaire](#)

[Licensing unit joins FIA](#)

The FIA at **Christmas**

- Kalamazoo's mitten tree
- Gifts for the troops in Iraq
- Eaton County's offering
- Benzie Manistee holiday spirit

## Bowler resigns FIA for judgeship

**Governor names Blue Cross executive new director**

**Legal affairs chief is director during 30-day interim period**

Governor Jennifer Granholm announced a change in leadership of the Family Independence Agency Dec. 10. Granholm said FIA director **Nannette Bowler** has accepted an appointment to the Ionia County Probate Court and resigned her post with FIA effective Dec. 19.



**Nannette Bowler**

Granholm said **Marianne Udow** will succeed Bowler as FIA director effective Jan. 12, 2004. Udow will take a leave of absence from her position as vice president of health care products and provider services for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan to assume her new position.

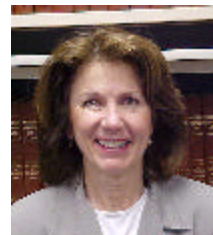
From Dec. 19 to Jan. 12, FIA legal affairs director **Musette Michael** is interim agency director.



**Marianne Udow**

Prior to joining the Blues in 1988, Udow was senior vice president of the planning and operations at Mercy Alternative Health Systems and was executive director of Care Choices. She has a master's degree in health services administration from the University of Michigan School of Public Policy.

Udow has a long list of accomplishments including being honored by the Anti-Defamation League with its 2000 Women of Achievement Award and being selected by Crain's Detroit Business in 2002 as one of "Detroit's 100 Most Influential Women."



**Musette Michael**

Michael has been director of FIA Bureau of Legal Affairs since January 2003. An attorney with a background in children's social services, Michael was an assistant attorney general under both Frank Kelley and Granholm.

"While I served with you, the employees of FIA made great strides in improving the lives of Michigan's families and children," Bowler said in a final message. "The team at FIA is a fine example of excellence in public service. I (am) impressed by the work you do every day. I am confident (my) successor will continue the critical work of uplifting children and strengthening families to which the team at FIA has been so dedicated."

## More than 250 children adopted on Michigan "Adoption Day" Nov. 25

Michigan gave thanks to adoptive families Nov. 25 during the first state Adoption Day, an event sponsored by the Michigan Supreme Court and FIA. With assistance from local FIA offices and private adoption agencies, courts in 35



### **FIA Icon online**

a publication of Michigan's  
**Family Independence Agency**

**Jennifer M. Granholm**, Governor  
State of Michigan

### **Family Independence Agency**

**Musette A. Michael**, Interim Director  
Karen Smith, Director  
FIA Office of Communications

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Budget, Administration & Finance

counties finalized adoptions for more than 250 children that day, held celebrations for adoptive families, and provided information about the adoption process.

FIA officials, county directors and staff, state and U.S. legislators and members of the state Appeals and Supreme Courts attended the events. This was the first time Michigan held a statewide event. It was affiliated with National Adoption Day, Nov. 22. The results of Michigan Adoption Day are typified in these statements by Oakland County FIA director Margaret Warner.

"It was terrific," Warner said. "I was present for five adoptions including an MCI (ward) whose younger brother is now placed in the same home and will also be adopted once things are clear. His new mom was sobbing with joy while dad tried to control the two-year-old who disrupted everything! Judge Pezzetti...was just super. She took time for each family, allowed pictures, brought the kids up to her desk (and) let them 'call things to order' with her gavel."

Adoption is the only option for children who can never return to their birth families because of abuse or neglect. About 4,500 state wards have adoption as a goal and most have a family identified. Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange lists about 400 permanent state wards available for adoption that do not have an adoptive family identified. The FIA is actively recruiting adoptive homes for these children. See [www.mare.org](http://www.mare.org) for listing of children seeking adoptive homes.

For more on adoption day see the story later in this issue or [click here](#).

## **Intercepted letters**

**Date:** Oct. 17  
**To:** Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MISDU)  
**Subj:** Great job

I would like to personally recognize the support that DaimlerChrysler received from the MISDU in the payout of our \$3,000 ratification bonus. Ms. **Marcia Jones** was instrumental in sending us a consolidated file of all child support arrearages for all DaimlerChrysler employees electronically. Thank you personally, along with Len Boros and Manish Shah of the DaimlerChrysler staffs, for a job well done! This was a carryover process that we utilized with Wayne County in the past. We were able to save endless hours of follow-up and input to our system required with a paperwork process. The DaimlerChrysler payroll staff thanks you for your innovative support. We are working now to expand this type of cooperative effort with some of the other agencies that we interact with. You have helped us build a benchmark process. Thanks for your continued support!

**Marie De Arment**, Manager  
Corporate Payroll Services  
DaimlerChrysler Corporation

■ MISDU is a contract agency to the FIA that collects child support payments from employers and disburses child support payments to custodial parents. It is part of Michigan's Child Support Enforcement System. Marcia Jones works under contract in FIA Office of Child Support.

**Date:** Sept. 23  
**To:** Jane Varboncoeur, Eligibility Specialist  
Oceana County Family Independence Agency, Hart  
**Subj:** Thank you

Since you see people when they're at their most down and out, I doubt you get the "thank you"s you're due. I can't tell you how very much I appreciate not only all you did for me today, but the sweet, accepting way you dealt with me. What was a horrible, humiliating experience you made more than decent. The way you handled it allowed me to feel like a human being. Twenty-one years can beat a person to

# Letters policy

"Intercepted letters" is one of the most popular features in FIA *Icon online*. Correspondence submitted for publication must have the approval of the author in order to be printed. Unsigned letters and signed correspondence requesting the author's identity be hidden will not be published.

Correspondence from FIA customers or service applicants must be accompanied by a signed [Consent for Publication](#) form. This self-explanatory form can be downloaded from the MS Word template as form [0199.dot](#). The consent form must include the names of other family members cited in the letter. When correspondence comes from a minor, a parent must give approval by signing the consent form. When the author is not an FIA customer or service applicant, rules of courtesy apply and the author should verbally approve your decision to publish before correspondence is submitted.

the point of feeling downright embalmed – like everything has been drained from their body.

I just can't thank you enough. You went so far above and beyond what I'm sure most caseworkers would have, I couldn't help but write a note to let you know what it all means to me. It's common knowledge none of you earn the salary you should. Please know you make a lasting impact, even though your clients probably don't often let you know. Thanks again.

[Valerie Cary](#)  
**Mears**

**Date:** Sept. 23  
**To:** Rick Trier, Children's Services Supervisor  
Mason County Family Independence Agency, Ludington  
**Subj:** Professionalism

I would like to take time to sincerely thank you for the support and professionalism you showed, encouraged and taught me in the last 18 months while with the Kidz First Program, not only as a community team member or a professional of your work, but as a human being who cares and wishes to make a difference in people's lives. If I only learned one thing – and there were many – from each and every one of you, I know inside without a doubt that I will be a richer and better person for it. I enjoyed this opportunity and experienced a kindness and reward in the fact that I was a part of your team that may have contributed in a positive way to a person or persons lives in this society and in this community. I hope and pray for the best for you not only today but forever. May all your dreams and goals come true. Thank you so much, continue the great works, take care and may God bless you.

[David Bialochowski](#)  
**West Michigan Child and Family Leadership Council**  
**Ludington**

■ The author worked as assistant wraparound facilitator for West Michigan Community Mental Health Systems under a contract to Lake-Mason-Oceana counties through September 2003.

**Date:** July 22  
**To:** LaDonna Hill  
Disability Determination Service, Lansing  
**Subj:** Scott Barnes

When I received my disapproval of claim notice I wasn't certain if I should be happy or sad. Sad because I would have to continue to forge on in my quest for benefits or happy because I could write a letter about one of your employees without having it viewed circumspect.

During my very first phone conversation with Mr. [\(Scott\) Barnes](#) I was pleasantly surprised by his professionalism. Beginning with that conversation and continuing on for the next four months, Mr. Barnes was always kind, considerate and compassionate in a very respectful and specialized manner. What a pleasure it was to speak with him. I never imagined having such a likable person on the other end of the phone line. How many times have we all heard about the nasty (Social Security) representative? Unfortunately, people with this assessment must not have had the opportunity to work with Mr. Barnes.

I have a feeling that, due to the nature of your business, the public does not fully understand or appreciate the responsibilities of a disability examiner. I am sure that in the course of the day each one of you is mistreated in some fashion by applicants for (Social Security) benefits. Working under these circumstances would make it difficult to remain pleasant throughout the day which is why I wanted you to know how much I appreciate Mr. Barnes' professionalism.

I wanted to bring Mr. Barnes representation of your agency to your attention because many times good workers are overlooked and taken for granted in the course of a day. I am certain this is not the case with you and that you appreciate Mr. Barnes as much as I do. You are lucky to have him as one of your staff members.

[Elizabeth Moeller](#)

**Bloomfield Hills**

■ Scott Barnes is a disability examiner for the Disability Determination Service in Lansing.

## First lines of service report available

A 42-page report was posted on FIA-Net Nov. 24 that for the first time defines some outcomes from the lines of service “immersion” process in the Family Independence Agency.

This project, initiated earlier this year, involves 500 staff persons from around the state that have examined each line of service in the agency and made reports to agency executives. The report – called [Lines of Service Immersion Process Report Sept. 16, 2003](#) – can be viewed or printed from FIA-Net under “Employee Information” and “Lines of Service Information”.

Several employees that participated in the State Emergency Relief-Weatherization line of service review offered their comments on the nearly year-long process.

“I see the process as a way to look at each line of service carefully and try to find ways to streamline the policy and/or process necessary to make determinations of eligibility,” said Jeri Messeroll, a lead eligibility specialist with Ingham County FIA in Lansing. “As an ES, it is my hope that, taken as a whole, these groups will reduce my workload or at least make it more manageable.”

A Berrien County manager had another perspective.

“The immersion process has been a unique opportunity to work with people from across the state and central office hand in hand,” said David Fernandez, a family independence manager from Berrien County FIA in Benton Harbor. “Perhaps the greatest accomplishment was to see so many folks from the field involved, especially in giving us a direct line to express our concerns directly to the agency’s top echelon. Having been in the field for the last 10 years I have rarely seen such opportunity.”

Another member of the team echoed his comments and praised changes already enacted.

“The opportunity to be a team member was very satisfying,” said Brenda Loepke, a family independence manager for Calhoun County FIA in Battle Creek. “It has often been said that words coming from field staff remain unheard. This was not the case with the SER committee. Central office team members and the Executive Council embraced our recommendations and positive changes have already been made in SER policy. I look forward to reconvening next year and eagerly await implementation of more recommended changes.”

Want to know more? Contact:

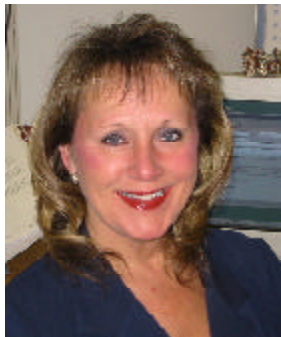
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**David Fernandez**



**Brenda Loepke**



## FIA people

Former FIA director **Nannette Bowler** announced the following county director appointments:

### **William Denemy**

of Petoskey as director of the Charlevoix/Emmet County FIA office effective Nov. 23.



**Bill Denemy**

### **Dennis Major**

of Greenville as director of Mecosta-Osceola County FIA, effective Nov. 23.

### **Jane Johnson**

as director of the Muskegon County FIA office effective Nov. 9. All three had been acting directors in their respective counties.



**Jane Johnson**

## Heart of the Solution awards 12 suggestions

From Sharon Zuzga, Heart of the Solution Coordinator

FIA Office of Communications, Lansing

[Zuzgas@michigan.gov](mailto:Zuzgas@michigan.gov)

Since Heart of the Solution went live in July the Lines of Service and Field Services Administration awarded 12 Heart of the Solution suggestions. Heart of the Solution is the FIA internal procedure for suggesting improvements in processes.

Congratulations to suggestors on the following nine suggestions that were awarded and are currently being implemented.

- Suggestion #20030190 from **Paul Henry Petiprin**, Midland County, regarding "Reevaluation of Reports".
- Suggestion #20030227 from **Marcie Burroughs**, Cheboygan County, regarding "Paper Waste Reduction".
- Suggestion #20030250 from **Marcia Morden**, Saginaw County, regarding "Suggest another "block" of hours, lower than 70 for day Care Payments".
- Suggestion #20030266 from **Margaret Rosenbrook**, Wexford County, regarding "Office of Child Support Letters received by Workers".
- Suggestion #20030281 from **Ed Helwig**, Isabella County, regarding "Eliminate assist report for adult workers VB99 253, Change report FIA 2355 to one copy only".
- Suggestion #20030309 from **Joan King**, Delta County, regarding "County Composite Directory updates".
- Suggestion #20030338 from **Lakshmi (Lynn) Subramanian**, Central Office in Lansing, regarding "Worker Safety Alert".
- Suggestion #20030694 from **Jean Greene**, Antrim County, regarding "Send an email alert to local offices when forms or pubs are revised or (made) obsolete". from ASSIST and Microsoft Word".
- Suggestion #20020717 from **Kittie Dodd**, St. Clair County, regarding "Eliminate page two of the FIA-59B from printing from ASSIST and Microsoft Word".

The following three suggestions were awarded but the FIA is not able to implement them at this time:

- Suggestion #20030287 from **Karen Lempke**, Wexford County, regarding "More fraud investigators to recoup money lost to fraud".
- Suggestion #20030564 from **Deb Harrah**, Ionia County, regarding "Install solar film on building windows to cut down on air conditioning costs".
- Suggestion #20030611 from **Sherrie Bupp** of Shiawassee County regarding "Notifying customers of new workers".

From July through early December, FIA employees have submitted approximately 650 suggestions. If you have a suggestion to make or would like more information on the process, please go the Heart of the Solution icon on FIA-Net.

## Looking for Love...

By Julie Jenkins, Director Reintegration Services, and Karen Woods, Gender Specific Specialist

FIA Bureau of Juvenile Justice

[Jenkinsj@michigan.gov](mailto:Jenkinsj@michigan.gov)

- Adapted from an article of the same name by the authors.

In 2000, the FIA Bureau of Juvenile Justice began to focus more attention on services to girls in the juvenile justice system. Research recommends that gender-

# Children's Action Network

The Family Independence Agency school-based program known as Family Resource Centers is part of the Children's Action Network, an initiative of Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Another part of the initiative is **Project Great Start**, an initiative to help children start life and school better.

Information on the project is available online at [www.greatstartforkids.org](http://www.greatstartforkids.org) including Q & A questions about Project Great Start ranging from "What is Project Great Start?" to "How does Project Great Start relate to the public awareness campaign, 'Be Their Hero from age Zero?'"

specific program providers listen to girls. In addition, staff recruitment, selection and training are critical to gender specific programming. Staff should represent the diversity of the girls they serve and be trained in ways to engage girls in healthy, appropriate relationships.

Many professionals have asked how to reduce recidivism and the escalation of girls into the adult correctional system. In May, the authors posed the following question to 14 inmates at the Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth: "What can the juvenile justice system do to prevent female juvenile offenders from entering the adult system?"

These women – all volunteers – were selected from the Scott Correctional Facility, which houses 850 female inmates, with these caveats: they must have spent time in a Michigan juvenile facility and not be emotionally or mentally challenged.

The women in this group ranged in age from 18-41; ten were between age 18-24. All entered the juvenile justice system before they were 14. Thirteen were African American. Four had been in foster care and each experienced multiple placements in the foster care system. Their crimes ranged from uttering and publishing (writing bad checks) to carjacking to murder with sentences from three years to life. None of the women were legally married at the time of the interviews and 11 had children. Half of their children were living with relatives; the other half were in foster care.

Common responses from their interviews included:

- Don't send kids to prison; they only learn to be better criminals.
- Don't scare me – help me. Get to the root of the problem – therapy & counseling are valuable.
- Deal with inmates' personal victimization. All participants were angry with their mothers because they did not protect them from the harm – whether physical, emotional or sexual – they experienced as children.
- The system needs to do a better job with dysfunctional families – especially preventing dysfunction.
- Substance abuse is used as medication. "It heals the pain," one said.
- Justice systems must ensure mothers and their children maintain contact and relationships.
- The most significant finding – these women looked for love everywhere. They ran from placements looking for love, assisted boyfriends in crime looking for love, and had children looking for love.

The 14 women made numerous recommendations for the justice system including:

- Teach practical living skills at a learner's level and follow up with practical experiences.
- Use mentors. "There's got to be a somebody for everybody who is willing to be helped," said one.
- Teach confidence and self-esteem and help the woman build confidence and self-esteem.
- Individualize treatment, show youth the positives of life, reward and reinforce positive behavior.
- Discourage co-ed programming since most girls are going to try to get a boyfriend and not pay attention to what's being offered.

Practitioners and program administrators interested in developing gender specific programming for girls should also contact Karen Woods at [WoodsK2@michigan.gov](mailto:WoodsK2@michigan.gov)

# Quiet heroes

By Kathleen M. Lake, Services Supervisor  
St. Joseph County Family Independence Agency, Centreville  
[Lakek@michigan.gov](mailto:Lakek@michigan.gov)



Kathleen Lake

This was submitted by Jean Skalski of St. Joseph County FIA. "It was written in response to the question, 'Have we accomplished anything?' asking for anything new or extraordinary our office might have accomplished," she said. "This is a very fitting response, given the current state of affairs."

## Have we accomplished anything?

We feed and house families in temporary need. We stand ready to rescue children in desperate situations, 24 hours a day. We attempt to rehabilitate juveniles. We reunite children with their families or, failing that, help them to find new permanent homes. We assist families in mourning and burying their dead loved ones. We send our staff to protect the independence of our most vulnerable adults. We provide the means for temporary shelter in emergencies.

We translate our programs for those who do not speak English. We provide medical assistance payments whenever possible. We offer an avenue for people to receive assistance in finding jobs. We work on committees with other agencies to extend our reach into the county and help people who may never enter our doors.

We have staff who spend their days working behind the scenes, making all these things possible, from reception through the mail service (and paying the bills).

Have we accomplished anything? Just the usual stuff.

## FIA customer honored for achievements

Information:

Joyce Bosscher, Kent County Family Independence Agency, Grand Rapids  
[Bosscherj@michigan.gov](mailto:Bosscherj@michigan.gov)



Lisa Hudson

Aside from the FIA Achiever of the Month program, welfare reform success stories don't receive the public acclaim they did in the late 1990s. Still, thousands of people are making the successful transition from welfare to a better life with the assistance of the FIA and a sympathetic employer.

One of those success stories was honored in Grand Rapids in November.

**Lisa Hudson**, whose current FIA case opened in November 2001, was honored as a "Women of Achievement" during the Grand Rapids' YWCA's Tribute 2003 luncheon Nov. 6. The annual event recognizes exceptional women that improved the lives of others with their leadership, community contributions and achievements

"Lisa Hudson is a woman of accomplishment and of faith," the YWCA said when making the announcement. "Through her commitment to lifelong learning, she is an example of self-improvement within the Cascade family."

The organization selected Hudson for her participation with Act's Gospel Outreach Ministries, her commitment to community improvement, and for being a beacon for working women striving for success.



Joyce Bosscher

# At risk family, new parent training

From Jim Nye, Deputy Director  
FIA Field Services Administration  
[NyeJ3@michigan.gov](mailto:NyeJ3@michigan.gov)

As part of her Project Great Start initiative, Gov. Jennifer Granholm requested that all staff that deal with at risk families and new parents be trained in early brain development of the infant and the importance of early education.

The Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health has released an informative audio compact disk by Dr. Joan Firestone called "Building Children's Brains". Copies of this CD are being sent to FIA local offices to be used with all staff who deal with at risk families or new parents. The suggested format for sharing this information is to have staff listen to the 20-minute audio CD at staff meetings.

A printed handout of the information can be downloaded and copied for distribution from this web site: <http://www.maimh.msu.edu/publications/JoanFirestone.pdf>

FIA Field Services Administration distributed at least one CD to each county office.

"As a strong advocate of government social programs, Lisa testified on Cascade's behalf before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means on practical techniques for bridging the cultures of poverty and middle class work places," the YWCA said.

Hudson is a single parent of four children ranging in age from 5-16. She is employed with Cascade Engineering in Grand Rapids, having worked there since September 1999. Her position at Cascade Engineering is a Core Operator-Level C. Cascade is an award-winning welfare to work employer that manufactures plastic products.

Hudson represents the sometimes long and arduous journey thousands of women make in the transition from welfare to self-determination. A member of her own mother's case in 1971, 31-year-old Hudson is making strides to move from assistance to independence. She currently receives Medicaid and Food Assistance from FIA.

"Lisa is a very good employee and being a good role model to her children is very important to her," said Joyce Bosscher, a family independence specialist with Kent County FIA. "She is always willing to learn and continues to better herself so she may advance her career at Cascade Engineering."

Bosscher works on-site at Cascade Engineering and is a liaison between the county FIA and the manufacturer that employs numerous Kent County FIA customers.

## Food drive in Manistee County

From Shirley Sawdy, Departmental Analyst  
Benzie-Manistee Family Independence Agency  
[Sawdys@michigan.gov](mailto:Sawdys@michigan.gov)

Manistee branch of the Benzie-Manistee FIA recently held an all employee food drive to benefit a local weekly parent education program called Love for Children.

FIA county director **Douglas Lapham** commended



**Douglas Lapham**

employees for their participation and caring for others.

With food drive proceeds in photo at right (left to right):

**Misty VandenHeuvel**, administrative support; **Phil Riggs**, eligibility specialist; **Cosette Schaefer**, community services; and **Mary Ann Hagemayer**, executive director of the Love for Children office.





# Angels of adoption

An Escanaba couple with a long history of service to Michigan children was recognized as Congressional "Angels of Adoption" in September.



**Kevin Julien**



**Mary Julien**

**Mary and Kevin Julien** were honored in a Washington D.C. ceremony with other adoptive parents from the 50 states. The Sept. 30 event honored families sponsored by members of U.S. Congress. Al Hunt of the Wall Street Journal emceed the ceremony, which featured presentations by Muhammad & Lonnie Ali and actor Bruce Willis.

Their commendation was circulated in Associated Press stories where they were pictured with U.S. Sen. Carl Levin of Detroit. Levin is a founding member of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption.

The Juliens' earned the commendation by fostering and adopting many children over the years. They first adopted Krystal, now age 6, and later adopted sons Kyle – now 13 – and Sean, age 2. Both boys have issues related to earlier abuse.

"This award is just a small token of appreciation for their efforts," said Levin. People in Escanaba appreciate their contributions, too.

"(The Juliens) are willing to open their home and take children at a moment's notice whenever they receive a call, anytime day or night," said **Sue Asplund**, a foster home licensing worker and foster care worker at Delta County Family Independence Agency in Escanaba.

"Since being licensed with Delta County they have fostered 15 children," she said. "Not all of these children were special needs children in the way some may think of 'special needs'. However, just the fact that there was a need to place them in foster care makes them children with special needs."

Asplund said the Juliens have been licensed foster parents with Delta County FIA since June 1999. They were previously licensed with Lutheran Social Services and adopted their daughter as an infant through that agency. They adopted the two boys, who are not siblings, since being licensed by Delta County.

"Both their boys have medical problems," Asplund said. "The youngest has very severe medical problems (from shaken baby syndrome including blindness and seizures) and will be completely dependent for life."

In addition to their service to children, Asplund said the Juliens are committed to helping other foster and adoptive parents.

"Kevin and Mary are both actively involved in our foster parent association," she said. "They regularly exceed their yearly training requirements. They have assisted other foster parents and relative care providers by providing respite care when needed."

Asplund said the Juliens' commitment has not been restricted to Delta County.

"Menominee and Baraga FIA have both borrowed this home and each have only positive things to say about the care the children received and the Julien's cooperation with their agency," she said.

"Various other agencies have been involved in working with children placed in their home. These agencies have also found the Juliens very cooperative and helpful.

Asplund seconded the “angels” award saying, “I have found it a pleasure to work with them as their licensing worker (and) foster care worker.”

Other Michigan residents received “Angel in Adoption” awards Sept. 30 including **Jaclyn Hope Champnella**, nominated by Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Lansing; **Charlie and Gerry Brown**, nominated by Rep. Dave Camp of Midland; **Linda Cromartie** nominated by Rep. Mike Rogers of Brighton; **Sandra Jones**, nominated by Rep. Carolyn Kilpatrick of Detroit; **Alan and Kristine Yeadon** nominated by Rep. Nick Smith of Addison; and **Steve and Constance Nitsch** nominated by Rep. Fred Upton of St. Joseph.

## Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative

**Information: Jerome Rutland, Director**  
**Wayne County Family Independence Agency, Detroit**  
[Rutlandj@michigan.gov](mailto:Rutlandj@michigan.gov)



**Jerome Rutland**

Michigan is one of a handful of states that belongs to a national project to assist the transition from prison to communities for inmates in state correctional facilities. In Michigan the project is called the **Prison ReEntry Initiative**. The initiative involves many state corrections, human services and law enforcement agencies including the Family Independence Agency, which is part of the state advisory council.

The initiative involves corrections, human services and law enforcement agencies because they share common customers. Prisoners exiting the state prison system regularly come to FIA for services ranging from assistance to medical care. Specific links between the FIA and offenders are connections between drug abuse, domestic violence, intervention by Children’s Protective Services, and a return to prison.

The initiative is based on a state-level partnership and development of Transition Accountability Plan for prisoners – a blueprint for offenders’ time in prison, community supervision and aftercare, including a reentry plan for each offender that covers six months before and after release from prison.

The initiative is critical insofar as 40 percent of offenders wind up returning to prison and Michigan has the nation’s fifth-largest prison population.

Federal grants will support development of the project and the advisory team is developing a state implementation plan and preliminary goals for the program.

**Jerome Rutland**, director of the Wayne County Family Independence Agency, is the agency coordinator for the project. Contact him by telephone at (313) 456-1025.



**Fred Harris**

## Transparent County Lines success

**By Fred Harris, Director**  
**Antrim-Kalkaska Family Independence Agency**  
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In January, the FIA – assisted by departments of Career Development (now Labor and Economic Growth) and Information Technology – established a pilot project in 32 Zone 1 counties called Transparent County Lines. The pilot offered citizens in the 32 northern Michigan counties the opportunity to receive services from the FIA office closest to them, regardless of which county they live in.

# Mid-Michigan FIA partners with State Police to lessen violence

From Joyce Larkin  
Clinton County Family  
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The Clinton-Gratiot County FIA offices have partnered with the Michigan State Police in offering free gunlocks to area residents age 18 and older. The gunlocks are provided by the "Project Child Safe", a nationwide program to help ensure safe and responsible firearm ownership. This initiative mirrors the missions of the FIA & Michigan State Police to keep children safe and to provide valuable services to the citizens of our state.

The free gunlocks can be picked up at either one of the local FIA offices Monday through Friday from 8 A. M. to 5 P.M. The free gunlock can also be obtained at the Michigan State Police Lansing Post located at 7119 Canal Rd., Lansing during their regular business hours.

For more information, please contact either [Dan Carley](#), Community Resource Coordinator, in Clinton County at (989) 224-5555 or in Gratiot County at (989) 875-8228, or Scott Nichols of the Michigan State Police at (517) 322-5574.

In her memo announcing the pilot becoming operating procedure, the FIA director indicated future rollout would be a possibility. Based on our success I believe the model could eventually be applied statewide, although urban centers have caseload dynamics different from counties in Zones 1 and 2.

Still, I think people who have predictable chronic needs for community resources are either unlikely to elect the option, know more about their elected county or district of service than they do their residence county, or have a long history with their service county.

Reflecting on some of our early discussions of protocol for the pilot, we had a number of acceptable reasons to allow it. As it turns out, our customer service focus is alive and well via Transparent County Lines.

## Adoption Day in Michigan

Michigan's first Adoption Day was Nov. 25 when 35 courts around the state finalized adoptions for about 250 state wards. Here is a brief rundown of activity from some participating counties reported by FIA staff members.



**Alpena County:** "Six children were placed for adoption, four were finalized," said adoption specialist [Jean Pierce](#). "Following the court proceedings families departed for private celebrations. This was a gathering of professionals who 'make it happen' for our adoptees."

**Antrim County:** "It was very special in Antrim, very, very nice," said FIA director [Fred Harris](#).

**Bay County:** "Our Adoption Day was a huge success," said [Jan Soper](#), Zone 2 adoption specialist. "Our first adoptive family were foster parents that adopted a little boy two years ago. The adoptive mother had also been adopted. Our second family had an entire courtroom full of extended family present."

**Calhoun County:** "Our event began with a short video focusing on the need for adoptive parents," said children's services supervisor [Cyntheal Cooper](#). "As people walked into the room they could look at drawings created by children being adopted – and (children who were) previously adopted – which represented what adoption meant to them."

**Delta County:** "The event in Delta County was a private adoption," said FIA director [Russell Sexton](#). "(State) Rep. (Tom) Casperson was there as well as zone manager [John Nelson](#) and myself and adoption worker [Jeff Stevenson](#)."

**Genesee County:** "Adoption Day was a great event for two families," said [Joyce Ernst](#), adoption specialist. "Both adopted a sibling group of two children. One eight-year-old being adopted with his five-year-old brother was very excited. He said, 'Adoption is better than Christmas!'"

**Grand Traverse County:** "The morning was great, thank you for letting us be part of it," said [Catherine Irene Stuart](#). "I just love seeing 'my' kids look so well cared for and going to families that want them."

# Adoption and the Family Independence Agency

Michigan has been recognized as a leader for our innovative approach to adoption and our high adoptive placement rates. The success of Michigan's program can be attributed to the unique partnership between the public and private agencies responsible for adoption planning and placement of foster children who become permanent state wards.

The FIA is given the charge of finding permanent homes for children who have come into the state's care. Some of these children have been abused or neglected and all of them have been removed from their home. A court has terminated their parents' rights after efforts to improve the family's situation failed.

Michigan takes great efforts to encourage the adoption of children who are permanent state and court wards by families who understand the children's sometimes painful and traumatic backgrounds and are willing to provide the parenting and home life necessary to care for them. Together with private agencies, FIA staff search for appropriate adoptive families that will best meet the needs of the child.

**Hillsdale County:** "We had four families with five children involved," said [Cynthia Caskey](#), adoption specialist. "Judge Michael Nye presided over the hearings, two of which were stepparent adoptions. There was much excitement and even a few tears of happiness shed."

**Ingham County:** "Adoption Day was held with Judge Lawless presiding," said [Karen Iverson](#) of Zone 3. "Judge Lawless' staff requested that media address their questions to FIA representatives. The main questions asked: why we were sponsoring such a day and what was the need for recruitment?"

**Jackson County:** "Nine children were adopted through the FIA," said [Tanda Reynolds](#), services program manager. "In the morning Judge McBain officiated the adoptions of six siblings. Five were adopted by their aunt and uncle. Judge McBain made the adoptions very personal and special for each child. Two (other) adoptions took place in Judge Vandercook's court."

**Monroe County:** "Judge Pamela Moskwa conducted hearings for 14 children in nine families," said adoption specialist [Joyce Ballard Davis](#). "This included nine MCI wards, an international adoption, stepparent adoption, private adoption and a 'safe delivery' infant. A single mother adopted three foster children, MCI wards from Wayne County. There were lots of smiles!"

**Newaygo County:** "It was very nice (with) eight kids to three different families," said FIA director [James McCormick](#). "One set of three is a case I know well (with a) terrible past. It was very nice to see them get permanency in their lives. Adoption hearings are the best thing we do. It was interesting how many people had never been in court for a good thing!"

**Oakland County:** "What a rush!" said FIA director [Margaret Warner](#). "It was terrific to be present to see kids of all ages, heritage (and) experience achieve permanent families."

**Ottawa County:** "(Judge) Mark Feyen opened Adoption Day and spoke to a courtroom that was standing room only," said [Shelly Fraser](#). "Feyen presided over adoption confirmations for six children...four were single child adoptions and one was a sibling group of two."

**Saginaw County:** "Judge Harrison finalized seven adoptions – six done by the FIA," said adoption supervisor [Ann Shea](#). "The courtroom was transformed into a countryside garden with four-foot flowers and balloons. For a month prior to the event, Harrison rented 25-foot by 5-foot movable signs – that said Adoption Day Nov. 25 – that were taken to different locations in the county."

**St. Clair County:** "Judge Brown finalized 13 adoptions," said [Bonnie Bracken](#). "The award for 'best behaved' went to a 2 ½ year-old and his 2 ½ year-old brother. They waited in the hallway of the courtroom for a very long time with no complaints. They were adopted by their foster family."

**Washtenaw County:** "A wonderful event," said [Adelia Clark](#), adoption supervisor. "The FIA and local courts collaborated to finalize 18 adoptions in one and one-half hours. The families were very happy; some of them expressed their appreciation directly to FIA specialist with words of 'love' and 'thanks.'"

**Addendum:** "Whomever came up with the idea of Adoption Day in Michigan is a genius," said Grand Traverse director [Mary Marois](#). "In my 35 years I cannot recall a day that gave me more personal pleasure. The typical stoic looking courtroom was filled with the laughter of children and the colors of bouquets and balloons."



If you are in a suicidal crisis call 911 and ask for help. Tell them you are in suicidal danger. **The National Suicidal Hotline** is also available 24 hours 7 days a week at **1-800-784-2433** (for **TTY** please call **1-800-448-1833**).

A resource that is also available to classified state employees and immediate family is the Employee Service Program. Contact the **Employee Service Program** Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to talk to a counselor by telephone or in person. In **Lansing** call **373-7630** or **1-800-521-1377**. In **Detroit** call **456-4020** or **1-800-872-5563**.

**This article was provided by the Employee Service Program, administered through the Office of State Employer, and was adapted with permission from National Screening for Mental Health, Inc.**

# Are you worried about a friend or loved one?

By Harry Hunter, Jr., MSW, MBA  
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**Did you know...**70% of people who commit suicide tell someone about it in advance. Sometimes those contemplating suicide talk as if they are saying goodbye or going away forever.

One study observed that nearly 50 percent of suicide victims had a positive blood alcohol level. Between 20 and 40 percent of people who kill themselves have previously attempted suicide.

Those who have made serious suicide attempts are at much higher risk for actually taking their lives. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed.

Serious depression can be manifested in obvious sadness, but often is expressed instead as a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that were once enjoyable.

***Answer the following questions about the person you are concerned about.***

## Suicide Risk Questionnaire

### Part I

Have you heard:

- I feel there is no way out.
- I'd be better off dead.
- Life isn't worth living.
- You'll be sorry when I'm gone.
- I won't be around to deal with that.
- My family would be better off without me.
- Next time I'll take enough pills to do the job right.
- Take my (prized collection, valuables) – I don't need this stuff anymore.
- I just can't deal with everything—life's too hard.
- Nobody understands me—nobody feels the way I do.
- I won't be in your way much longer.
- There's nothing I can do to make it better.

Have you observed:

- Getting affairs in order (paying off debts, changing a will).
- Giving away articles of either personal or monetary value.
- Signs of planning a suicide such as obtaining a weapon or writing a suicide note.

### Part II

Have you noticed the following signs of depression:

- Depressed mood.
- Change in weight or appetite.
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, or guilt.
- Change in sleeping patterns (too much/little, disturbances).
- Thoughts of death suicide, or wishes to be dead.

Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness.  
Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities.  
Withdrawal from family and friends.  
Fatigue or loss of energy.  
Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness.

If depression seems possible, have you also noticed:

Extreme anxiety, agitation, or enraged behavior.  
Excessive drug and/or alcohol use or abuse.  
Neglect of physical health.  
Feelings of hopelessness or desperation.

### **Questionnaire interpretation**

If you checked any of:

**Part I only**, your friend or family member may be at risk for suicide and should seek professional help immediately.

**Part II only**, your friend may be suffering from depression and should seek further evaluation with a mental health professional or his or her primary care physician.

**Parts I and II**, the suicide risk is even higher. **Strongly encourage your friend to seek professional help immediately.**

**What to do** if you suspect a friend or loved one is suicidal

**Do take it seriously.** 70 percent of all people who commit suicide give some warning of their intentions to a friend or member of their family.

**Do be willing to listen.** Even if professional help is needed, your friend or loved one will be more willing to seek help if you have listened to him or her.

**Do voice your concern.** Take the initiative to ask what is troubling your friend or loved one, and attempt to overcome any reluctance on their part to talk about it.

**Do let the person know you care and understand.** Reassure your friend or loved one that he or she is not alone. Explain that, although powerful, suicidal feelings are temporary, depression can be treated and problems can be solved.

**Do ask if the person has a specific plan** for committing suicide, and how far he or she has gone in carrying it out. (***Note:** asking about suicide does not cause a person to think about—or commit—suicide. This is a myth.*)

**Do get professional help immediately.** Bring your friend to a local hospital emergency room or crisis center (if your friend is already in treatment, contact his or her clinician). Your friend will be more likely to seek help if you accompany him or her. If all else fails, notify your community police, who are trained to handle situations like this.

**Do follow up on treatment.** Take an active role in following up with the treatment process and medications. Be sure to notify the physician about any unexpected side effects or changes in behavior.

**If for any reason you are unsure, uncomfortable, or unable to take action**, find a responsible adult with whom to share your concerns or contact your local police. It is better to have an angry friend than a dead one.

**Whatever you choose to do**, the important thing is to make the effort.

***Don't assume*** the situation will take care of itself.

***Don't leave*** the person alone.

***Don't*** be sworn to secrecy.

***Don't act*** shocked or surprised at what the person says.

***Don't challenge*** or dare.

***Don't*** argue or debate moral issues.

## Christmas and the FIA



## Kalamazoo County's mitten tree

From Robert Peck  
Acting Administrative Manager  
Kalamazoo County FIA  
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The mitten tree was put together by family independence manager [Kelly Richards](#) and program manager [Bev Barrone](#). We've put up the mitten tree in our lobby in Kalamazoo for some years.

We collect donations and decorate the tree with the collected mittens and put up a sign that says, "Please take as you need but use all you take".

As you might expect we've gone through a lot of mittens. Our front desk receptionists say it is great to see children picking which mittens they want from the tree.

Overall this has been great for our staff and our customers. We look forward to continuing this tradition next year.

## Foster care, child care licensing unit joins FIA

### Commissions on blind, disability concerns depart

Effective Dec. 9 the Office of Children and Adult Licensing became part of the Family Independence Agency and the Michigan commissions on the blind and disability concerns departed the agency.

The licensing unit – formerly called the Bureau of Family Services and Bureau of Regulatory Services – was transferred from the Department of Consumer and Industry Services to the FIA as part of Executive Order 2003-18. The change is part of Gov. Granholm's reorganization of state government designed to promote job creation and economic growth.

The same executive order moved Michigan Commission for the Blind and Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns from FIA administration to the newly created Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

"The FIA is primarily concerned with children and their families as well as vulnerable adults," Granholm said. "We believe it's a proper fit for both the bureau and the agency."

The Office of Children and Adult Licensing is responsible for the licensing and regulation of 32,700 facilities serving more than 500,000 Michigan children and adults. The office has 204 staff and a FY 2003 budget of \$23.5 million.

The office has a toll free number – **1-866-685-0006** – for **public inquiries** regarding original or renewal license information for adult foster care facilities, child day care homes and centers, child caring institutions, child placing agencies, camps and homes for the aged.

For **complaints** about providers, please call toll-free **1-866-856-0126**.

For more information contact the FIA web site at [www.michigan.gov/fia](http://www.michigan.gov/fia) and click on "Doing Business With FIA" and "Licensing".

## Something from home for our troops in Iraq

By Willa Curtis, FIA Technical Assistance Team (TAT), Lansing  
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My son, Sgt. Gregg Curtis, is currently in the U.S. Army stationed in Iraq. While he receives frequent letters and boxes from home, others in his unit do not. On Dec. 4, the staff at the McCree District in Genesee County filled and mailed 15 boxes to our service people in Iraq. This was the result of a collaborative effort by staff from the McCree District, Saginaw County and TAT.

How did this get started? My son told me he was the only person in his platoon that received mail and boxes from home on a regular basis and provided me with the names of each person in his platoon. I worked with staff in Flint to do something about that.

The District Manager of the McCree District – [Barbara Anders](#) – sent an e-mail to the staff and told them that I was looking for donations and asked for those who

# Technical Assistance Teams (TAT)

These specialized teams were developed to assist local offices in Food Assistance error reduction and analysis, process mapping and performance improvement planning. TAT teams conduct targeted case reads and can also be utilized to provide local targeted training.

were interested to contact me. One of my TAT co-workers in Saginaw County notified the staff in her office of this project and she collected items there.

Overall, the response was overwhelming. Staff in the McCree District, Saginaw County and one of the TAT teams made donations. We received many cash donations to help cover the mailing costs.

Each box weighed about 15 pounds and included a musical Christmas card, chips, nuts, chocolate, books, at least one game and various other snack items. Each box was addressed to an individual in his platoon and we sent them through the U.S. Postal Service with the help of even more volunteers.

The McCree District staff went above and beyond in this effort, including donating their lunch and break times to assist in packing and addressing the boxes. Without their help we could not have finished this task. A great big thank you is in order for all that participated!

I can't tell you how good this made everyone feel and I'm sorry we couldn't have done more. It was wonderful to think so many people cared that much.

n The author is a departmental analyst with the Technical Assistance Team currently assigned to the Genesee County McCree District.

## Eaton County holiday offering

### Christmas for local adult foster home residents

By Pat Simmons

Eaton County Family Independence Agency, Charlotte

[Simmonsp2@michigan.gov](mailto:Simmonsp2@michigan.gov)

Christmas morning was made a little brighter for residents of adult foster home facilities in Eaton County through the generosity of local FIA staff.

For more than 23 years—the longest any current employee can remember—the local FIA office has sponsored a gift giving program for residents of Eaton County adult foster homes who would otherwise wake to an empty tree on Christmas morning.

In the early years, the program would adopt 10-15 community residents. We set a record in 2002 when 43 residents benefited from the giving program.

The Eaton County Adult Services Unit contacts local foster homes to request the names of adults who may not have families or friends who are able to remember them during the holidays. The home provides the names for the program recipients, along with items the individual needs, favorite food, games, music, or toys. Staff



Eaton County staff members gather with their gifts for residents in their community. Pictured (standing left to right) Sandra Deeghan, Maureen Zapolski, Chris Earley, Suzanne Stiles Burke, Pam Buhs, Barbara Brandon, LaVerne Duncan, Greg Johnson, Katie Shumaker, Lancea Daily and Jan Myers. Kneeling are Michelle McGuire and Marie Iott.



select an individual to sponsor, then shop with an individualized list for each adult resident.

The program has become such a tradition that even after leaving the Eaton County office, many individuals continue to sponsor one or more participants.

The Adult Services Unit—**Maureen Zapolski**, **Michelle McGuire** and supervisor **Chris Earley**—want to thank all the staff who participate and share in the joy of giving. This year, a special thank you is sent to **Penny Bridges**, a 2002 adult services retiree who volunteered to coordinate the program.



**Benzie-Manistee staff responsible for the holiday offering (above left to right): Becki Brooks, Leann Thomas, Jean Picardat, Marta Delgado and Misty VandenHeuvel. Also pictured inset left (l-r): Sonja Reitan, Elaine Saffron and Shannon Louisignau.**

## **Benzie Manistee Holiday Spirit**

**From Cindy L. Nelson, Social Services Administrative Supervisor  
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The administrative support units from the Benzie and Manistee county FIA offices made gift bags for several of the local nursing home and AFC home residents this year. These nine women shopped for and wrapped robes, slippers, lotion and candies among other things.

In Manistee they also delivered the packages, although the residents were experiencing an outbreak of the flu so the packages were left in the entryway of the building. This is truly an excellent display of the holiday spirit!